

Darnell named Procurement Supervisor of the Year

Ginger Darnell, manager of the Institutional Procurement Office at the Johnson Space Center, has been selected as the Procurement Supervisor of the Year under the NASA Procurement Awards Program.

Darnell manages a diverse range of procurement functions at JSC which support the center’s daily operations and infrastructure including base operations; information technology and services; construction and modification of facilities; safety, reliability, and quality assurance; technology transfer; and public affairs.

Darnell is extremely proud of the accomplishments of the procurement professionals in her office in the areas of performance-based contracting, the use of small business/small disadvantaged business in meeting center requirements, the use of commercial and mid-range procedures to expedite the procurement process, the implementation of the credit card program at JSC, and the reduction in the backlog of contracts to be closed out. Although she enjoys the many challenges and complexities that come with managing such a diverse area, her greatest enjoyment is working with and developing the people in her organization.

Darnell began her federal service career in 1973 with the Internal Revenue Service and joined NASA in July of 1980. She has spent most of her NASA career in the field of procurement supporting the Space Shuttle Program, the Space Operations Program, Research and Engineering activities, and Center Operations. She also worked as a policy analyst for a short while in the Lunar and Mars Exploration Office and as a branch chief in the Center Operations Directorate, serving as

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– Ginger Darnell



Tom Luedtke, associate administrator, NASA Office of Procurement, presents the Procurement Supervisor of the Year Award to Ginger Darnell, manager of the Institutional Procurement Office at the Johnson Space Center.

a contracting officer’s technical representative and overseeing a wide range of administrative functions at the center.

Darnell feels that her experience working in other areas has allowed her to see the procurement process from a totally different perspective and that this greatly enhanced her effectiveness once she returned to procurement. “I like to encourage people to take some risks and to try new things occasionally. Although it’s great to be an expert in one particular area, I feel that you really need to stretch yourself and to broaden

your experience base in order to expand your career opportunities.”

Darnell is also a firm believer in the value of actively participating in professional organizations such as the National Contract Management Association. She has been a member of the Space City Houston Chapter for almost 20 years, serving as the Chapter president in 1995, holding various other offices through the years, and receiving the honor of NCMA Fellow in 1997.

From a procurement standpoint, Darnell feels that the greatest challenge she has faced so far in her career was working on the agency-wide Consolidated Space Operations Contract. Along with Contracting Officer Roberta Beckman, Darnell was a member of the Acquisition Strategy Team as well as the Source Evaluation Board. The goal of CSOC is to reduce the overall cost to NASA for sustained high quality and reliable space mission operations and data services. CSOC is intended to shift the end-to-end

management responsibility and performance accountability from the five NASA centers to the CSOC contractor.

According to Darnell, “This was a unique experience to deal with five NASA centers to pull off this multibillion-dollar procurement to consolidate all or part of 16 existing NASA contracts. Not only were the cultures of the centers quite different, we had the huge complexity of moving primarily level-of-effort contracts into a performance-based contract. Needless to say, there were some pretty tense moments in our strategy sessions and SEB meetings, but ultimately we succeeded as a NASA team in awarding the CSOC contract.”

Because of the wide variety of procurement actions handled in her office, which includes everything from purchase orders to multimillion-dollar support services contracts, Darnell’s office is often considered a training ground for new contract specialists and purchasing agents. She considers it critical for her employees to have a good understanding of what is required of them in terms of training, performance, and attention to customer service. “I try to stress to employees that it is really up to them to take responsibility for their own career development and to ensure that they are taking advantage of every opportunity out there to increase their knowledge and their work experience.”

One example of a career development opportunity that Darnell took advantage of herself was a 3-month rotational assignment in the Office of Legislative Affairs at NASA Headquarters. This opportunity to gain an understanding of how NASA interacts with Congress and responds to external issues was invaluable.

Other awards that Darnell has received include the NASA Exceptional Achievement Award for her management of the procurement activity supporting the Space Shuttle Program, the JSC Certificate of Commendation for her management of contracts supporting the Center Operations Directorate, and the Source Selection Acquisition Improvement Award for the CSOC procurement. ■



JSC area once home to Native Americans

By David Haines

The immediate vicinity of the Johnson Space Center was home to Native Americans, some dating back as far as several thousand years B.C. and predating tribal affiliation.

There are literally hundreds of ancient campsites located in the greater Galveston Bay complex, several of which are located on Clear Lake and its adjacent estuaries. The campsites, or “middens,” are actually ancient refuse piles which are composed of the detritus of the daily lives of these prehistoric Texans, and include broken pottery shards, flint projectile points, animal and fish bones, and literally millions of shells of the mussel *rangia cuneata*. When in season, the rangia clam was a staple food item of these people, as it thrived in the not-too-salty brackish water of the Galveston Bay estuarine system.

Erosion, subsidence and tidal action over the millennia have all acted to expose some of these middens; others have been exposed inadvertently by development. A nearby example of a midden exposed by development is the Harris County Boys Home site, located adjacent to JSC on Mud Lake. This prehistoric site is one of the largest on the entire upper Texas Coast and is marked with a Texas State historical marker. The site was exposed as the Clear Lake Forest subdivision was being developed and a

storm drain excavation exposed some ancient burials.

The people who inhabited the Galveston Bay area in antiquity were not a culturally advanced civilization when compared to other native peoples, such as the Plains tribes. Archaeological studies have shown that theirs was a mean existence, with provision of food and the battle against the elements taking precedence over all other activities. They were able to develop a fairly extensive trade network with neighboring peoples to the north and east, who provided flint for tools and other commodities in exchange for such items as sea shells, which were used for ornaments and decoration.

The first known European contact with these people was recorded by the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca who, with his crew, was shipwrecked on Galveston Island in 1528. De Vaca spent several years with the natives as their quasi-captive and traveled great distances with them throughout the southwest portion of what is now the United States. Fortunately, he kept a diary of his captivity and travels, and it is this document which provides the only known firsthand account of life among these people.

For more information on this subject, see “The Indians of Texas from Prehistoric to Modern Times” by W. W. Newcomb Jr. and *Texas Monthly*’s “Field Guide to Stone Artifacts of Texas Indians.” ■

A poster for an "Open House 2" event at the Johnson Space Center. The poster features a collage of space-related images: a rocket launching, a view of Earth from space, an astronaut in a space suit, and a close-up of a spacecraft component. The text "OPEN HOUSE 2" is at the top in large, bold letters. Below it, "JOHNSON SPACE CENTER" is written in a stylized font. At the bottom, it says "FREE EVENT Saturday, August 26 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Houston, Texas". On the right side, it says "Space City USA" and provides the website "http://openhouse.jsc.nasa.gov" and the phone number "281-244-5321". The NASA logo is in the bottom right corner.